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ABSTRACT

The project, currently underway, forms part of the national board's followup of the reform of higher education in Sweden, and studies the effects on student recruitment of the new, more liberal admissions rules. This report discusses the dimensions and directions of the study. (MSE)

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POINTS OF DEPARTURE

This project forms part of the UHÄ's follow-up of the reform of higher education. Its primary purpose is to study the effects of the new rules of admission for higher education on student recruitment. The project supplements the current and more short-term evaluation of the implementation of the new rules which is being undertaken in conjunction with the Admissions Function of the UHÄ (CA).

The new rules of admission were preceded by a long process of inquiry in which the original proposals were gradually modified. The resolution of principle concerning wider admissions to higher education was passed by Parliament (Riksdag) in 1972, and the new rules of eligibility and selection were adopted simultaneously with the reform of higher education. The Government and Riksdag have particularly emphasized that the follow-up of the reform of the higher education system should cover the implementation of the rules of admission and their social effects, e.g. "applicant structure, the impact of the rules on upper secondary school, the effect of the percentage guaran-

tee [1] and the ability of the labour market to provide job experience" (UbU 1975:17). These instructions were prompted by uncertainty and divisions of opinion concerning the effect of the new rules when applied. The uncertainty is due to the rules of admission being altered at the same time as a number of other changes are made to higher education, and also to the outcome being very much dependent on student response.

Apart from this uncertainty, the following motives can also be adduced in favour of the project.

(1) The new rules of admission are a vital part of the reform of higher education and a precondition of other parts of the reform package.

(2) Theoretically at least, the new rules of admission mean that upper secondary school is divested of its governing influence on the individual's choise of education and vocation, the "critical moment of choice" being moved up the scale to post-secondary level.

(3) The implementation of the new rules will eventually come to include additional branches of education.

(4) There is international interest in following the progress of the Swedish system, which is unique in some respects.

On the other hand it must be added that the examination of higher education recruitment from the vantage point of rules of admission is subject to certain limitations. In a society with a high general level of education, it is arguable that the point of departure ought instead to have been the adjustment of educational amenities to the needs of new groups of students and to the total living situation of the students. Wider rules of admission are a necessary but hardly a sufficient prerequisite of wider recruitment. The somewhat longer term evolution of the project should therefore be left an open question.

STRATEGY

The new rules of admission cover practically all university education in the traditional sense, i.e. two-thirds of the general educational programmes and individual courses or, roughly, two-thirds of the total educational capacity of the new system of higher education. The remaining part of education is based on comprehensive school (9 years) qualifications or is subject to special rules of admission. The

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1) In addition to the rule of proportional distribution of study places between different categories of students there are certain garantee rules implying that at least certain percentage of the places in each program will be reserved for applicants coming directly from secondary school or applicants without complete secondary schooling.

present project deals with that part of the higher education system which is covered by the new rules and those parts of the system of rules which are decided centrally. This means that the follow-up will focus on the rules governing general eligibility, the principles of special eligibility and the rules governing selection for educational programmes with intake restrictions.

A study of the effect of the rules on recruitment will, to begin with, require access to wide and representative data concerning student intake in different branches of higher education. Information of this kind is obtained from official statistics and the central admissions system. The work of the project will therefore include the exertion of influence on the collection and administration of data by the Central Bureau of Statistics (SCB) and the Admissions Function of the UHÄ (CA). Not until the next stage can there be any question of making special studies of sub-groups or scrutinizing the influence of individual factors on selection in the light of the general analysis of recruitment. Unfortunately the general statistics will be superficial and available with considerable time-lag, owing to computer teething troubles and shortcomings in the information system of the new higher education administration. Certain spot surveys will be carried out so that some idea can nonetheless be obtained of recruitment effects within a reasonable space of time. These surveys will be principally based on information derived from local planning activities or from current evaluative projects.

In keeping with the principles of the follow-up programme, projects are to be practically oriented and geared to the activities with which they are concerned. In the case of the Admissions Project this will demand close collaboration with the Central Admissions Board and its secretariat within the UHÄ. The aim should be not only to describe but also, if possible, to explain the effects of the measures taken. This latter aim will also require the theoretical analysis of various practical alternatives, backgrounds and motives. The aim of the project can be summed up as follows:

(1) To give a general picture of the effect of the new rules of admission on higher education recruitment.

(2) To analyse the basic principles of the system of rules in the light of the outcome.

Finally, the practical orientation of the project also implies preparedness for a gradual adjustment of direction of the project as new information becomes available.

ANALYSIS OF MOTIVES AND PRINCIPLES

The rules of admission must be followed up in relation to the goals and directions of change which have been previously defined. This cannot be done without a closer analysis of the underlying goals and their manifestation in the system of rules. To establish a platform of this kind, a review will have to be undertaken of the proposals put forward on the subject by a succession of official committees. The officially stated aims of the reform of admissions are couched in very general terms. What purports to be a goal often turns out to be simply a means of achieving an overriding goal at the next level, e.g. wider recruitment for the sake of social equality. The relations between means and ends are often open to objection.

A hasty inspection also reveals that the motives given for the goals incorporate a number of goal conflicts. These conflicts become even more numerous if one also takes into consideration such goals of higher education development as exist beside the rules of admission, e.g. vocational orientation and decentralization. So far only a few of these goal conflicts have been brought to the surface. A closer examination of such conflicts, coupled with particulars concerning the real outcome, will make it possible to trace and account for undesired effects. This will also facilitate discussions of the more long-term direction of the project by pointing to weak or doubtful points in the system of rules.

There appears to be a particularly urgent need for the examination, in logical terms, of the quota rules applying to educational programmes with intake restrictions. The principle of proportional quotas, combined with special eligibility requirements, a multiplicity of choices, rules concerning "double eligibility" etc., seems to have a perverse effect on recruitment by giving different groups of applicants substantially different chances.

THE EFFECT OF THE RULES ON RECRUITMENT

General eligibility primarily governs admissions to the "free" sector. Here, then, there is a clear connection between eligibility requirements and the question of intake restrictions or "total dimensioning". The resolution of principle on the new eligibility rule was in fact taken subject to the resolution - now discarded - in favour of a "totally dimensioned" system of higher education. Now that the "free" sector has been revived and developments in the labour market are a topic of uncertainty, there is reason for this connection to be taken into account in the follow-up. Even though there are no signs of a repetition of the student explosion of the 1960s, extended eligibility combined with a "free" sector may warp the range of educational opportunities.

In a wider and more differentiated system of higher education, it is definitely less interesting to consider the total effects of extended eligibility. It is just as interesting, if not more so, to study the distribution of different student categories between different types of education within the higher education system. Within the framework of an unchanged stratification of society, the question of admission or non-admission to higher education may have changed into a question of distribution between different kinds of education within the higher education system.

The new rules have opened higher education to new groups of upper secondary school leavers (from the two-years lines) and to adults without complete previous secondary schooling. These two groups are in the main focus of interest where the follow-up of general eligibility is concerned. The fundamental question, of course, is the extent to which these groups exercise their newly acquired right to higher education and the types of studies they go in for. Great differences in this respect can be taken as the starting point of closer studies of motives and impediments.

Wider admissions are nothing new at the former arts faculties; experimental activities based on the "25:5 rule" [2] have been in progress ever since 1969. There has been no real evaluation of this experimentation. Such an evaluation is intended within the framework of the project, partly to obtain comparative data extending backwards in time but also to analyse on a more general plane the effects of new routes being opened into higher education. Among other things it should be of interest to study changes over time (latent needs, successive reduction of the same, delayed effects etc.).

One important question in the follow-up is of course the extent to which wider eligibility leads to social equalization. The egalitarian effects of education, especially as regards the role of higher education in this context, is a debated point, but anticipations in this respect have been put forward as the most important argument in favour of widened admission. It is traditional for such effects to be measured in terms of the proportion of recruits coming from families belonging to different social or occupational groups, and a survey of this kind is now being planned under the auspices of the Central Bureau of Statistics. But the possibilities thus afforded of a closer investigation of the personal educational and vocational backgrounds of adult students are no less interesting. Co-operation has been established with the Central Bureau of Statistics concerning this survey.

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2) A rule according to which adults - 25 years of age and with at least five years of working experience - have been granted admission to certain courses within the unrestricted faculties.

It is important for the follow-up of wider eligibility to proceed in the light of events throughout the education system at post-secondary level. Rules of admission are merely guiding instruments, and the widening of admissions in one quarter will have repercussions elsewhere - for example, on educational activities run by the adult education associations. The project will thus come to include the question of lines of demarcation between the higher education system and the activities of the adult education associations.

One has to distinguish between education with and without the stipulation of prior qualifications. In the case of education involving such stipulations, choices are commonly made in subordinate school systems, i.e. upper secondary school and municipal adult education. Consequently it is here that the effects should first appear. It has nonetheless been judged advisable to include studies of these effects in the second stage of the project. There is also a link-up here with current evaluation activities at the National Board of Education and within the Commission on Upper Secondary Schooling. The effects of the system of rules on the labour market cannot be studied during the first round either, although the above mentioned study of student backgrounds by the Central Bureau of Statistics may shed light on certain problems.

The scope of special qualifications for eligibility is a question concerning the balance between wider recruitment and the need for adequate study aptitude. The actual occurrence of such stipulations should therefore be studied in the project. The more demanding these stipulations are, the greater will be the determinant influence of upper secondary school and the further the idea of "higher education for all" will be from practical realization.

It is not a task at central level to trace the outcome of this balance within different subjects. On the other hand attention should be paid to certain principles incorporated by the regulations, e.g. the exemption of persons aged 25 or over and with at least four years' job experience from the need to establish initial qualifications, the principle of stipulating an average mark of 3.0 for the qualifying subjects and the definition of initial qualifications in terms of upper secondary school grades (i.e. years).

Naturally the methods of selection primarily influence recruitment for educational programmes with heavy intake restrictions and they change the situations of young students as well as older ones. In reality the new rules of selection are borne up by the aim of changing the behaviour of young students in connection with their transition to higher education by crediting job experience in selections for admission. Wider recruitment for different programs of study in terms of age, sex, social background and working experience, can be taken as the objective. Developments in this respect can be elucidated with the aid of general educational statistics and social background surveys.

Surveys of this kind, however, need to be supplemented by studies of elimination mechanisms in the system. As part of the project, plans are being made for a study - to be conducted by collating material from the Admissions Function of the UHÄ and the Central Bureau of Statistics - to investigate the extent to which persons who fail to gain admission to courses of study with intake restrictions appear elsewhere in the higher education system within a certain time. Among other things, this may help to show what happens to young students who are eliminated because of the new rules of selection. It is also possible, without collecting any additional data, to compare how the applicant category compares with the persons admitted, in terms of sex and age.

An evaluation of the rules of selection is also bound to include an analysis of the extent to which the intended criteria actually decide admissions. Similarly, the practical effects of the quota rules will be scrutinized in the light of the actual outcome.

PUBLICATIONS

Kim, Lillemor 1977	The background and genesis of the new rules of admission. Working paper no. 1, the Admissions Project. Stencil, UHÄ. (In Swedish)
Kim, Lillemor 1977	Follow-up of the new rules of admission - points of departure and guidelines. Working paper no. 2, the Admissions Project. Stencil, UHÄ. (In Swedish)

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